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FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEATRA/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS MONROVIA 000931

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EINV](#) [EAID](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [LI](#)

SUBJECT: LIBERIA: FIRESTONE WORKERS' LEADERSHIP IN CORRUPTION
ALLEGATION

REF: A: MONROVIA 618; B: 07 MONROVIA 1439

¶1. SUMMARY: Firestone workers have accused the leadership of the Firestone Agriculture Workers Union of Liberia (FAWUL) of failing to account for over US\$150,000 of their dues. FAWUL leaders deny the allegations and the Ministry of Labor has instructed the union to resolve the matter through the union's internal dispute settlement committee. END SUMMARY.

¶2. According to local press reports, a group of Firestone workers filed a complaint October 20 with the Ministry of Labor alleging that US\$150,000 from their union membership dues were missing. (Note: the allegations do not involve donations from the United Steel Workers of America or earnings from FAWUL's investments. End note.) The petition also claimed the FAWUL leadership failed to deliver on campaign promises, misrepresented the workers during the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) negotiations with Firestone earlier this year (Ref A), and unilaterally drafted a new constitution making the union answerable only to the Ministry of Labor, rather than to members. The petitioners called on the Ministry of Labor to freeze and audit FAWUL's accounts and set up an interim arrangement to organize a fresh election.

¶3. FAWUL President Austin Natee and Secretary General Edwin Cisco denied the allegations and blamed the report on disgruntled former FAWUL leadership who lost the July 2007 elections. (Note: Natee and Cisco traveled to the United States in June 2008 to receive the George Meany-Lane Kirkland Human Rights Award for courage, innovation and leadership from the AFL-CIO. End note.) Natee also defended the CBA concluded between Firestone Liberia and the Union in 2008 as "the best CBA ever." For its part, the Ministry of Labor denied jurisdiction over the petition and instructed FAWUL leadership to use the union's existing grievances structure to resolve the complaint. The Ministry also referred the leaders to the national Tripartite Committee and the Liberia Labor Congress for grievances that are not resolved within local trade unions.

¶4. The 4,700 members of FAWUL elected the new leadership of the union in July 2007 and the leadership commenced negotiations on the CBA in January 2008 following a Supreme Court ruling that settled an internal union division (Ref B). The union signed the CBA with Firestone in August 2008. The CBA provides significant gains for workers, including wage increases, improvement in work and housing conditions, and upgraded educational facilities. As part of the CBA, each worker pays monthly union membership dues of US\$2.00 to the FAWUL. The money is meant to cover administrative costs and to protect the welfare of union members. FAWUL is scheduled to negotiate a new three-year CBA with Firestone in May 2009.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD